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# Harford County Commission on Disabilities Annual Report FY 2002



James M. Harkins

Harford County Executive

*~ Preserving Our Values, Protecting Our Future ~*

**Annual Report Fiscal Year 2002**  
**October 28, 2002**

According to a *"Profile of Selected Social Characteristics: 2000"*, published by the U.S. Bureau of the Census, 31,617 Harford County citizens, five years of age and above, have disabilities. The Harford County Commission on Disabilities remains committed to working to assure that all citizens of Harford County with disabilities are afforded a wide variety of quality daily living opportunities. Our activities, which are focused this year on the critical issues of accessibility and housing, are summarized in this report.

This year was one of transition for the Commission. We said farewell to outgoing Commissioners: Elizabeth Pearce, Michael Schneck, and Robin Krout. Buddy Green agreed to serve as Interim Chairperson until all Commission vacancies were filled. The Commission welcomed new members: Deborah Braam, Angela Cheek, Robert Coen, Michael Drummond, and Stacey Hull. Special thanks to Commission members, new and old, associate members, and friends of the Commission for making this a productive year.

This year will also be remembered because of the terrible tragedy of September 11, 2001. The special circumstances of individuals with disabilities in an emergency are of particular interest to the Commission and the entire disability community. The National Organization on Disability has established an Emergency Preparedness Initiative with a two-fold mission: to encourage the emergency management field to take into account the varied needs of people with disabilities in planning and response activities, and to raise the awareness of people with disabilities about what they can do to prepare for their own safety and survival during times of emergency. The Commission invited the County's Emergency Planning Manager, Douglas Richmond, to the September 2002 meeting to begin our education on this important issue.

The Commission was created through an act of County legislation and meets on the fourth Monday of each month at 5:00 p.m. in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor conference room of the Harford County Administrative Office Building, 220 South Main Street in Bel Air. The public is welcome and is also invited to visit the Commission web page at <http://www.co.ha.md.us/services/disabilities/>. To request disability-related accommodations at Commission meetings or a copy of this report in alternative format, please contact the Disabilities Coordinator, Sharon Grzanka, at 410-638-3373 voice/TTY, email [disability@co.ha.md.us](mailto:disability@co.ha.md.us).

Buddy Green  
Interim Chair

Susan F. Austin  
Co-Chair

## **Vision**

Harford County citizens, with and without disabilities, are provided equal opportunities to participate in all community activities.

## **Mission**

The Commission will advocate and act as a catalyst for positive change for citizens with disabilities by assessing needs, investigating opportunities for improvements in quality of life and supporting community participation.

## **Core Values**

We are advocates for all individuals with disabilities in Harford County and we work to address issues facing those individuals.

We are an information source for individuals with disabilities in Harford County.

We are vigilant concerning disability-related legislative matters at the local, state, and federal level, providing comments and recommendations as may be appropriate.

We focus on promoting full accessibility to public accommodations, educational opportunities, housing and transportation within Harford County.

## **Membership**

The Harford County Commission on Disabilities consists of 16 members, appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council, and additional non-voting members. Commission members who served during FY 2002:

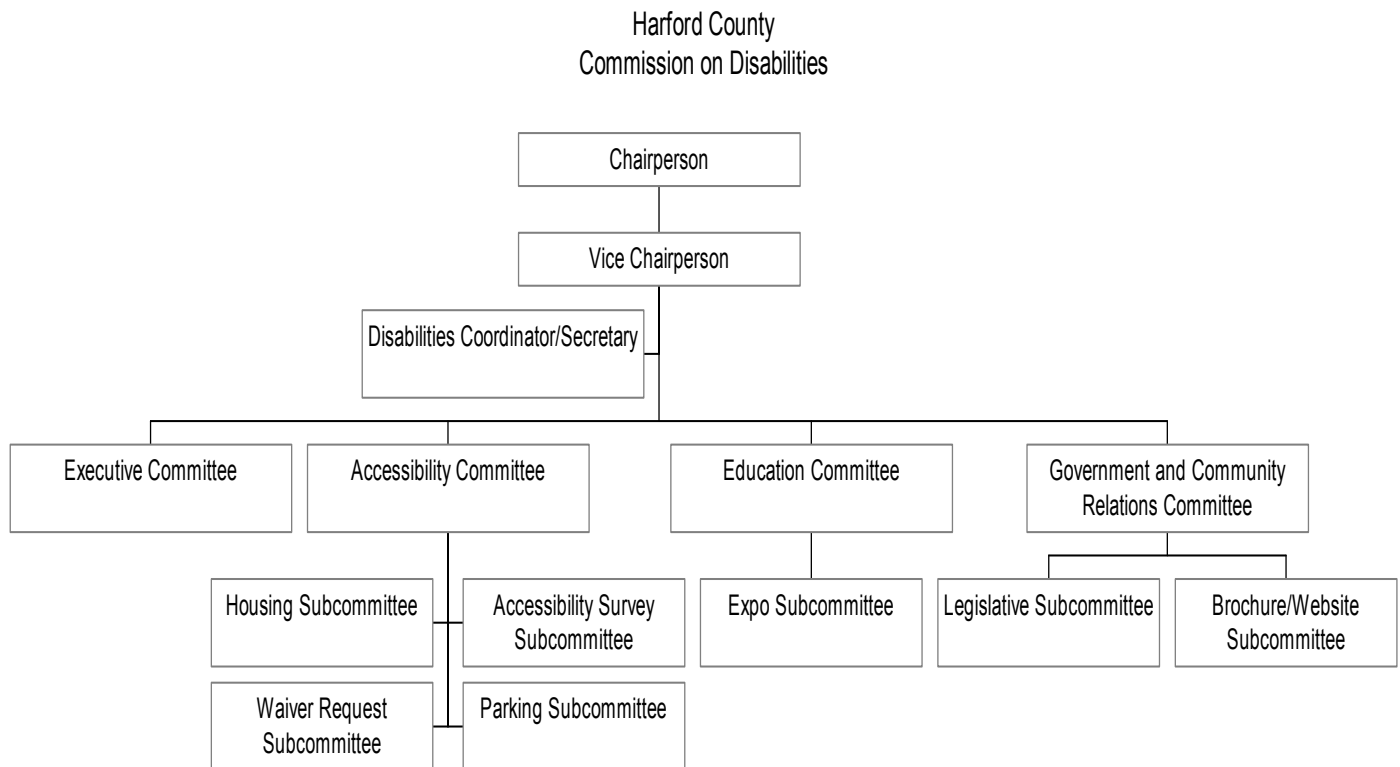
- Five county citizens with disabilities;  
Beverly Alleyne, Abingdon  
Deborah A. Braam, Bel Air  
Robert L. Coen, Street  
Bluett (Buddy) C. Green, Baldwin  
Stacey L. Hull, Forest Hill

- Student Representative:  
Erica L. Dietrich, Bel Air
- A member of the County Council appointed by the Council  
Robert S. Wagner, District E
- Two family members of individuals with disabilities;  
Gilbert F. Kennedy, III, Bel Air  
Patricia A. (Pam) Stewart, Bel Air
- One county citizen who owns or operates a local business or who is an employee of a local business, recommended by the Harford County Chamber of Commerce;  
Keith A. Lewis, Forest Hill
- Two county citizens with an interest in assisting individuals with disabilities;  
Laurie A. Kwiedorowicz, White Hall  
Angela D. Cheek, Aberdeen
- Four individuals representing agencies serving individuals with disabilities.  
Susan F. Austin, Co-chair, Harford County Public Schools,  
Office of Special Education  
Michael J. Drummond, Core Service Agency  
Carol E. Roughton, Division of Rehabilitation Services,  
Bel Air Office  
Michael D. Watkins, Harford County Department of Parks  
and Recreation

*Associate Members (non-voting)*

Joseph Cardiff, Edgewood  
 Richard Curtis, Joppa  
 Vernon DeHaven, Bel Air  
 Gail L. Fricke, The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region  
 Nancy Jane Kirk, Bel Air  
 Mitchell Neiburger, The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region  
 Kevin Racine, Havre de Grace  
 Michael Raidt, Bel Air  
 Mary Ann Whetzel, Forest Hill

## Organization Chart



The Commission functions through a committee structure. In 2002, the Commission had the following standing committees:

**Executive Committee:** The Executive Committee consists of the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, Committee Chairpersons, and the County Council Representative to the Commission. The Executive Committee meets on an as needed basis to facilitate the smooth flow of information to Commission members and to prepare recommendations for the consideration of and appropriate action by the full Commission. The Executive Committee also provides membership recruitment activities on behalf of the Commission to assure that all Commission membership vacancies are filled in a timely manner.

**Government and Community Relations Committee** (Formerly known as the Legislative Committee): This committee serves as a link between the community and the Commission by reviewing, monitoring, and supporting disability-related legislation and working to enhance communication.

- *Brochure/Website Subcommittee:* During the summer of 2002, the Government and Community Relations Committee, including other volunteers from the Commission, held several meetings to revise and expand the Commission Brochure. The revised brochure combines the Commission vision, mission, core values and updated information about contacting the Commission.

A planning meeting for the update/revision of the Commission web page is scheduled for September/October 2002. Our goal is to make the web page a place where citizens with disabilities, their family members, advocates, and service providers in Harford County can find up-to-date information about programs, services and upcoming events.

The Subcommittee also facilitated the preparation of the Commission Annual Report.

- *The Legislative Subcommittee:* The 2002 Maryland Legislative Session was productive in terms of enacting disability-related laws. Eleven laws were passed that affect Harford County residents with disabilities. Of those laws, the Commission supported six by letter:

House Bill (HB) 16: Vehicle Laws: Signs Designating Parking Spaces for Individuals with Disabilities.

Senate Bill (SB) 112: Vehicle Laws: Registration Plates and Parking Placards- Individuals with Disabilities.

HB 569: Education- Schools and Other Educational Programs-- Student Behavior.

SB 130: Office for Individuals with Disabilities- Extension of Sunset Law.

HB 343: Motor Vehicles- Parking Lot Spaces for Individuals with Disabilities.

SB 419: Maryland Infant and Toddlers Act of 2002.

- *Local Selection Subcommittee for the Maryland Youth Leadership Forum.* This subcommittee recruits, interviews, and selects Harford

County delegates to the Maryland Youth Leadership Forum. This year's delegate was Sharon Neary.

**Accessibility Committee:** This committee works to ensure that all aspects of life in Harford County are accessible to citizens with disabilities.

- *Housing Subcommittee:* Affordable and accessible housing is a concern for citizens with disabilities. The Commission on Disabilities, through the housing subcommittee, has embarked on a mission to begin exploring alternative housing options. Subcommittee members joined professionals from the public and non-profit sectors of the community on a Task Force on Housing Options for Citizens with Disabilities. The Task Force conducted focus groups, held public meetings, analyzed data, and developed recommendations to increase housing options for citizens with disabilities. These recommendations were subsequently incorporated into the County's Five-Year Consolidated Plan for community development. The Commission remains committed to defining and addressing this issue through the action steps outlined in the Consolidated Plan.
- *Accessibility Survey Subcommittee*, (Formerly known as the Community Development Block Grant Committee): Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits public entities from discrimination against or excluding people from programs, services, or activities on the basis of disability. In order to ensure that Harford County Government facilities are accessible to citizens with disabilities, the Commission applied for and received Community Development Block Grant funds to complete a Phase I Accessibility Survey. The survey involved 16 county facilities. The resulting summary of inaccessible features was prioritized and a plan for implementation of ADA upgrades was developed. This plan became part of Harford County's ADA Transition Plan. In 2002, the Commission was awarded CDBG funds to complete a Phase II survey. The Subcommittee worked with the Harford County Procurement Department to prepare a Request for Proposals and to select a consultant to complete the survey. The Phase II survey, which includes two county facilities, four Harford County public schools, and a training session for County and Harford County Public Schools facilities personnel, is expected to be completed by December 2002.

- *Accessibility and Transportation Subcommittee*, (formerly known as the Accessibility and Transportation Committee): At the Harford County Council meeting on April 9, 2002, the Harford County Commission on Disabilities premiered a videotaped interview on accessible (handicapped) parking problems experienced by people with disabilities. The interview, which was aired on Harford Cable Network (HCN) during April 2002, highlighted problems created by illegal parking in accessible parking spaces and blocking access aisles and curb cuts. The interview also provided a visual demonstration of an individual deploying a wheelchair lift from his van. Lt. Edward Hopkins, of the Harford County Sheriff's Office, discussed the penalties for illegal parking in accessible parking spaces.

The Commission on Disabilities approached HCN to produce the video in response to complaints about parking from citizens with disabilities. The intent was to provide community education about accessible parking and how important these parking spaces are to citizens with disabilities to work, shop, attend religious services and recreational events, keep medical appointments, etc.

Education about accessible parking does little good without appropriate, effective law enforcement. The Harford County Sheriff and the chiefs of police of the three municipalities got behind the Commission and the disability community by pledging increased emphasis on enforcement during April. In addition, County Executive Jim Harkins and the County Council designated April 2002 as "Parking for People with Disabilities Awareness Month".

- *Waiver Request Subcommittee*: This subcommittee functions as the "designated disability advisory group" in the Waiver Request Process as defined by the Maryland Accessibility Code. Members of the subcommittee work with Harford County Department of Licensing, Inspections, and Permits to review requests for waiver of the Maryland Accessibility Code and to provide the perspective of the disability community on the impact of the waiver.

**Education Committee**: (formerly known as the Expo Committee). This committee develops disability awareness events and presentations.



- *Expo Subcommittee:* The Commission and the Office of Special Education, Harford County Public Schools, will host the fourth Expo for Individuals with Disabilities on November 9, 2002. In FY 2002, the Commission focused on surveying individuals within Harford County to get ideas to increase attendance and community involvement. As a result of the survey, the Expo will be held at the Harford Technical High School. In addition, the following agencies and support groups will be co-sponsors of the 2002 Expo: the Active Citizens' Coalition for the Employment of Persons with Mental Illness, Inc. (ACCEPMI), The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region, Core Service Agency of Harford County, The Harford County Partnership for Families (Local Management Board), Mental Health Association of Maryland, NAMI-Harford County and The Parent's Place of Maryland. With the changes made to the upcoming Expo, including its name, the event is expected to be better than ever for the residents of Harford County.
- The following educational programs on disability-related topics were held at Commission on Disabilities public meetings:

Date	Topic	Presenter
11-26-01	Core Service Agency 2003 Annual Plan	Mona Figueroa, Core Service Agency
3-25-02	Commission on Disabilities Core Values and Strategic Plan	Bob Coen, Commission on Disabilities
7-22-02	Presentation to Sharon Neary, Harford County delegate to the Maryland Youth Leadership Forum	Erica Dietrich, Commission on Disabilities James M. Harkins, Harford County Executive
8-26-02	National Youth Leadership Forum for college students with disabilities	Julie Hocker

### **Disabilities Coordinator**

The activities of the coordinator during the fiscal year were as follows:

- Staff support to the Commission on Disabilities
- Information and referral: During fiscal year 2002, the Coordinator received 271 requests for information and assistance in the following categories:

General Information	86
Transportation	20
Housing	43
Accessibility	75
Education/Training	17
Financial Assistance	73
Employment	28
Commission on Disabilities	3
Personal Care	15
Health/Health Insurance	32

- Provided input on behalf of the Commission to the Harford County Transportation Development Plan.
- Coordinated the Commission on Disabilities participation in the Harford County Consolidated Plan for Community Development.
- Served as Commission on Disabilities' Liaison to the Maryland Alliance of Local Commissions on Disabilities and attends monthly education and information meetings at the Governor's Office for Individuals with Disabilities.
- Member of ACCEPMI, the Active Citizens' Coalition for Employment of Persons with Mental Illness, (Chair, Education Committee); the Local Interagency Coordinating Council of the Harford County Infants and Toddlers Program; the Harford Center Board of Directors; and the Harford County Committee for Employment of People with Disabilities, (Co-Chair).
- Coordinates sign language interpreter, world language translation, and Braille services for County Departments. Developed and distributed "Serving Citizens with Disabilities: A Guide for County Employees".
- Coordinated Americans with Disabilities Act training for Harford County public human resources professionals.

### **Action Plan for 2003**

- To promote improved enforcement of existing laws relating to disability issues.
- To promote full accessibility of all County facilities and activities.
- To promote full accessibility of public accommodations.
- To provide opportunities for community education on disability issues.
- To be recognized as the voice of the disability community in Harford County.